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ABSTRACT

An anonymous questionnaire on demographic characteristics, alcohol usage and drinking attitudes, and college-related attitudes was administered to 466 incoming freshmen (236 males, 230 females) at the University of Maryland, College Park. Fifty-five percent of all freshmen reported having taken their first drink with friends by age 15; 10 percent reported that they did not drink. Males reported higher frequency of use of both beer and whiskey than did females, while females drank dinner wine more often than males. In comparison with females, males tended to have been drunk more often, to have driven more often after having at least three drinks, and were more likely to say that most of their friends drink. Males drank most frequently in public places such as cars, ballgames, or concerts, while females drank most often in restaurants or lounges. Males and females also differed on several drinking attitude questions. Males more often thought alcohol safer than marihuana, barbituates, amphetamines, opiates, and psychedelics than did females. Males more often thought their parents preferred them to use alcohol rather than marihuana than did females. It is concluded that there are different patterns of drinking behavior and attitudes for different groups of students and for different types of alcohol, and that these differences are important in understanding alcohol use among students. (Author/LB)

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DRINKING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR OF INCOMING FRESHMAN

Deborah H. Johnson and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 6-79

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COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

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SUMMARY

An anonymous questionnaire on demographic characteristics, alcohol usage and drinking attitudes, and college-related attitudes was administered to 466 incoming freshmen (236 males, 230 females). Fifty-five percent of all freshmen reported having taken their first drink with friends by age 15. Nineteen percent reported that they did not drink.

Males reported higher frequency of use of both beer and whiskey than did females, while females drank dinner wine more often than males. In comparison with females, males tended to have been drunk more often, to have driven more often after having at least three drinks, and were more likely to say that most of their friends drink. Males drank most frequently in public places (e.g., car, ballgame, concerts), while females drank most often in restaurants or lounges. Males and females also differed on several drinking attitude questions. Males more often thought alcohol safer than marijuana, barbiturates, amphetamines, opiates, and psychedelics than did females. Males more often though their parents preferred them to use alcohol rather than marijuana than did females.

Relationships of drinking attitudes and behavior to other attitudes were explored and discussed.

Alcohol use on college campuses has become a widely discussed modern phenomenon. In an attempt to better understand students' drinking patterns, many factors have been discussed and studied as potential correlates and predictors of drinking. Demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status (Briggs, Orcutt & Bakkenist, 1974) and gender (Straus & Bacon, 1953; Hanson, 1974), have been found to correlate with alcohol use, as have social influence variables such as parental attitudes and behavior (Carrington & Sedlacek, 1976) and peer group pressure (Rogers, 1972). The present study represents an overall approach to understanding students' drinking habits by utilizing many different types of variables concurrently, including demographic characteristics, drinking attitudes, drinking history, and college-related attitudes.

In addition to studying correlates of alcohol use, many investigators have been interested in a more sociological analysis of group differences and change across time. Fago and Sedlacek (1974) and Carrington and Sedlacek (1976) found that the historic differential in alcohol use by males and females has diminished. Hill and Bugen (1979), in a study at the University of Texas, found that while women students more often reported that they had never been drunk, of those who had never been drunk, 91% of the women compared to 87% of the men reported that they had never tried alcohol. However, more women than men (57% vs. 41%) reported that they had increased their use of alcohol since entering the University, which agrees with Carrington and Sedlacek's (1976) findings. A second purpose of this study was to re-examine freshmen habits in relation to previous trends.

METHOD

A representative sample of 466 incoming freshmen (236 males, 230 females) were administered an anonymous questionnaire concerning demographic characteristics, alcohol use, drinking attitudes, and college-related attitudes.

Date Analysis

Frequency and percent distributions were obtained for all items and means and standard deviations were calculated for the attitude items.

To investigate potential differences in responses due to sex or to year, a 2-way analysis of variance (sex by year) was done for all alcohol use items, the frequency of drunkenness item (#7), and all attitude items. Responses to the item regarding place of drinking were analyzed by chi-square, comparing sexes and years. Significance level for all analyses was set at $p > .05$.

To determine predictors of alcohol use, step-wise multiple regression equations were obtained to predict use of each of the following types of alcohol: a) beer, b) hard liquor (gin, vodka, whiskey, liqueurs), c) dinner wines, and d) "pop" wines. Equations were double cross-validated, using randomly split samples. Predictors were sex, family income, age, frequency of drunkenness, and all attitude items. For those poll items for which response choices were nonlinear (age at first drink, place of drinking, reason for drinking), eta coefficients were computed to determine the relationships of each of these items with the frequency of use of each type of alcohol.

RESULTS

Description of Drinking Habits and Attitudes

A majority (55%) of the freshmen reported having taken their first drink with friends by age 15. While beer was commonly used (45% used beer at least once a week), the use of "hard" liquors was far less frequent. Drinking

appeared to serve primarily a social function for the students, as alcohol was usually drunk at parties (40%), in restaurants or lounges (14%), or at home (14%), and the most frequent reasons for drinking included wanting to be more friendly (24%), to get drunk or to feel good (21%), and to make a good mood last longer (13%). Most students (60%) reported having been drunk at least once, but a sizeable proportion (19%) of students reported that they did not drink.

While maintaining moderate personal drinking habits, the freshmen tended to hold rather liberal attitudes toward drinking. Most students said they understood the causes of alcoholism and did not believe that alcoholics have "weak personalities," yet the majority (61%) strongly believed they would never become alcoholics. Most (52%) had never driven after having had three or more drinks. The majority (55%) did not believe that alcohol is safer than marijuana, but most did see alcohol as safer than barbiturates, amphetamines, opiates, and psychedelics. The parents of these students were typically seen as preferring that their children use alcohol rather than marijuana, and most students (67%) had parents who drink alcohol.

Comparison of Males and Females

The results of the analyses of variance and chi squares indicated that males and females responded differently to several drinking-behavior questions.[1] Males reported higher frequency of use of both beer and whiskey than did females, while females drank dinner wine more often than males. In comparison with females, males tended to have been drunk more often, to have driven more often after having had at least three drinks, and to be more likely to say that most of their friends drink. Males drank most frequently at public places (e.g., car,

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1. All differences reported were significant at the .05 level.

ballgame, concert), while females drank most often in restaurants or lounges.

Males and females also differed on several drinking attitude questions. Males more often thought alcohol safer than marijuana, barbiturates, amphetamines, opiates, and psychedelics than did females. Males more often thought their parents preferred them to use alcohol rather than marijuana than did females. Males tended to believe that alcoholics have "weak personalities" more often than did females.

Relationships among Drinking Habits and Attitudes

Multiple regression equations were used to predict frequency of drinking of beer, hard liquor, dinner wine, and pop wine by using students' responses to other alcohol-poll items as predictors. Cross-validations of the equations indicated that the predictions were quite stable. The frequency of drinking beer, hard liquor, and pop wine were all positively related to the frequency of having been drunk, driving after having had at least three drinks, and believing that most of one's friends drink. Use of dinner wine, however, was related to different variables: a higher frequency of having been drunk, the belief that alcohol is safer than opiates, being female, and agreeing that one's parents drink alcoholic beverages are all predictive of higher frequency of drinking dinner wine. While drinking frequency for each of the four types of alcohol could be predicted significantly better when these predictors were used than by chance alone, beer and hard liquor drinking were much more predictable than were pop-wine or dinner-wine drinking.

Table 1 presents the correlation ratios (etas) relating age at first drink, place of drinking, and reason for drinking to frequency of drinking each type of alcohol. All correlation ratios were significant, indicating that each pair of variables is related more than would be expected by chance alone. Age at first drink with friends is related to drinking frequency: the younger a person was when she/he had the first drink with friends, the more of each

type of alcohol she/he tended to drink as an incoming freshman. The most frequent place of drinking was related in different ways to drinking of the various types of alcohol: highest-frequency beer drinkers, pop-wine drinkers, and hard-liquor drinkers tended to drink most often in public places (car, ballgames, etc.), while the high-frequency wine drinkers more often drank in restaurants. High-frequency beer, pop-wine, and hard-liquor drinkers also were alike in most often stating that they drank in order to get drunk or feel good; high-frequency dinner-wine drinkers, in contrast, more often drank to relieve general anxiety, tension, nervousness, or irritability.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study indicate that there are different patterns of drinking behavior and attitudes for different groups of students and for different types of alcohol. These differences are important in understanding alcohol use among college freshmen.

There are sex differences both in drinking behavior and drinking attitudes. In comparison to males, the females engaged in less drinking in general, and tended to use different drinks and to drink in different places. Drinking for females may be a more formal social phenomenon, such as drinking dinner wine in a restaurant or at home with parents; males' drinking may more often take place in more informal public places with friends. The females did not believe that most of their friends drink, while the males did have such a belief. The females did not mix drinking with driving as much as males did, perhaps reflecting both cultural standards (males drive while females ride) and sex differences in drinking places and reasons for drinking. Age of first drinking with friends and frequency of having been drunk are not different for males and females. Females tended to have neutral attitudes toward the safety of alcohol as compared

to many other drugs, while males believed that alcohol is the safest drug, and that their parents preferred them to use alcohol rather than marijuana. This last attitude, according to the cognitive dissonance theory may reflect the differences in drinking behavior: males, who drink more alcohol, may need to believe that alcohol is quite safe and condoned by parents, while females, in drinking less, may have less need for other-than-neutral attitudes regarding the safety and parental condonement of alcohol. Seemingly in contrast with this attitude, males tended to see alcoholics as having "weak personalities," while females did not. It seems that while some drinking is considered to be fine by most males, the extreme of alcoholism is considered to represent lack of strength and self-control, traits expected of the American male; in contrast, females are expected to be understanding and kind, traits which seem reflected in their less negative attitudes about alcoholics.

Drinking patterns seem to be quite different for different types of alcohol. Beer, hard-liquor, and pop-wine drinking have similar correlates, while dinner-wine drinking is a quite different phenomenon. Dinner wine is apparently used in more formal social occasions to facilitate sociability, and parents may play an important role in determining use of wines. Other alcoholic beverages, in contrast, are used more in public with friends for the purpose of becoming drunk or having a good time. Two different types of alcohol drinking thus emerge: the sedate drinking accompanying a social occasion, and the drinking which serves as an end in itself and as a focus for friendly gatherings. The first type may be related to parental, cultural, and religious influences, while the second type appears to be stimulated more by friends and situational demands.

It should be noted that the present set of potential predictor variables accounted for comparatively little of the variance in pop-wine and dinner-wine

drinking, while beer and hard-liquor drinking were much more predictable. Perhaps the variables used in the present study, most of which were directly concerned with drinking attitudes and behavior, were appropriate for predicting some types of drinking but not others. This study showed that beer and hard liquors often were consumed for the sake of getting drunk, while dinner wine might simply accompany social occasions rather than act as the focus for them. Therefore, the drinking-related predictor variables used in this study might have been quite appropriate and relevant to beer and hard liquor drinking, whereas research on the use of dinner wine might require the use of more demographic cultural and religious predictor variables. The present data do not provide an explanation for the relative unpredictability of the use of pop wines. Further studies would do well to explore these differences by using a wider range of variables. It would also be interesting to determine whether these differences extend to other persons as well as to incoming college freshmen.

In conclusion, alcohol use is not a global concept. Males and females differ in their drinking attitudes and behavior, as do the drinkers of different types of alcohol.

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Table 1.

Correlation Ratios (Etas) of Age at First Drink, Place of Drinking, and Reason for Drinking with Drinking Frequency by Type of Alcohol*

	Frequency of Drinking			
Question	Beer	Hard Liquor	Pop Wine	Dinner Wine
Age at first drink with friends	.68 (N=435)	.56 (N=435)	.39 (N=435)	.41 (N=435)
Place of drinking	.57 (N=431)	.43 (N=431)	.37 (N=431)	.40 (N=431)
Reason for drinking	.66 (N=371)	.52 (N=371)	.44 (N=371)	.43 (N=371)

* All Etas shown are significant at the .05 level